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INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 4993
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0538
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0238
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0916
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2198
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1876
RHMFSS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAHORE 000014

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV KWMN PK

SUBJECT: MUKHTAR MAI: THE NEXT STEP

REF: A) 09LAHORE215; B) 09LAHORE190

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In 2009, Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization (MMWWO) expanded its advocacy programs, trained community volunteers and provided assistance to over 800 victims of gender-based violence (GBV) while facing pressure from feudal powers in an unstable security environment. For much of June-October 2009, the organization was distracted by a murder case involving several members of the extended family of MMWWO's Chief-of-Staff, as victims, suspects, and witnesses. As of January 2010, MMWWO leadership and staff appear to have refocused on their mission: empowering women and fighting oppression. End Summary.

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Visit from RSO Sparks Progress
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¶2. (SBU) On January 6, PolOff met with Samson Salamat, MMWWO manager, and Naseem Akhtar, MMWWO Chief-of-Staff, to discuss recent activities of the organization and progress made in 2009.

Salamat expressed gratitude for the support ConGen Lahore and the Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor (DRL) provided in 2009, reftel A. He was particularly grateful for ConGen Lahore Regional Security Officer (RSO)'s November 2009 visit to MMWWO's center in Meerwala, Muzzafargarh District, Punjab Province. RSO provided a complete security assessment of the facilities and met with District Police Officer Mehboob Rashid. The police post nearest to the MMWWO facility had been consistently fully staffed since the RSO visit. MMWWO, with money from its existing budget, modified its facilities based on recommendations from RSO. These include adding higher perimeter walls with anti-climb wire; using three local guards instead of a single guard at any given time; and rotating guards among positions at the school, the resource center, and compound entrance. Since RSO's visit, the organization has not received any direct threats. Salamat directly associates these improvements with the RSO visit.

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Success Stories
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¶3. (SBU) In July 2009, MMWWO launched a community volunteer program to strengthen its outreach efforts in southern Punjab. Fifty volunteers work in Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, Rajanpur and Muzzafargarh districts to raise awareness about GBV. Over 200 people, including the volunteers, participated in a women's empowerment workshop in Multan on December 10, 2009.

Salamat said they had planned for over 700 people, but were forced to scale down the program after the December 8 terrorist attacks in Lahore and Multan. Activities included a speech competition by four female students selected from a larger competition held in the five southern districts. The students spoke against "honor killings" (murder of a family member who dates, marries, or refuses to marry, contrary to the wishes of the family); the need for tougher laws to deter GBV; and the role men can play in stopping GBV. Mukthar Mai herself spoke on the role of women in changing cultural stereotypes, and the need for government programs to protect survivors of GBV.

¶4. (SBU) On January 6, PolOff met with MMWWO social workers, a help-line supervisor and a shelter supervisor, in Lahore to attend a three-day GBV training. During this training, staff members learned best practices for intake and referral of new clients. They also visited other women's shelters, including one run by human rights activist Asma Jehangir, to exchange ideas. When PolOff asked the MMWWO workers what motivated them to do such difficult work, often in the face of opposition from their families, the staff members simply replied, "women." One social worker had herself sought shelter from MMWWO after refusing an arranged marriage. She faces continued threats from her family, and is grateful for the opportunity MMWWO provides her to help other victims.

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Resources Crunch Continues
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¶5. (SBU) Since 2007, DRL has funded two grants for MMWWO. The first, USD 470,000, is a three-year grant with International Rescue Committee (IRC) to support capacity-building and on-going

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technical support. The second, USD 225,000, is a three-year grant with National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to establish a women's resource center to provide shelter and legal assistance to victims of GBV. The total allocation of funds for the grants has been dispersed and work is expected to be completed by December, 2010. MMWWO has no/no domestic revenue source. Salamat said that Canada's International Development Agency (CIDA) had stopped funding for the school in November 2009. He inquired whether the USG would consider funding, reftel B.

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No Further Charges in Honor Killing Case
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¶6. (SBU) Salamat spoke briefly about the on-going murder investigation involving the family of Naseem Akhtar, MMWWO Chief-of-Staff, reftel B. Akhtar's two brothers and a cousin remain in jail. There is still pressure from the feudal forces in the area to implicate Akhtar in the investigation, but charges have not been filed against her. Akhtar said that the threats against her and her family continued, but she did not ask for USG intervention in this case during the January 6 conversation with PolOff. Note: From June to October 2009, MMWWO leadership pleaded daily with PolOff for intervention in Akhtar's case. Since early November 2009, MMWWO's focus has been more professional in both content and frequency. End Note.

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Comment: MMWWO Returns to Its Mission
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¶7. (SBU) To be successful in attracting additional funding after current grant moneys run out, MMWWO must continue to emphasize their work for women's rights and avoid involvement in the personal troubles of their staff. International donors have provided support for the infrastructure necessary to found MMWWO. It is the responsibility of the staff to see Mukhtar Mai's vision through and carry MMWWO. The organization must evaluate its programs and decide how to continue its work in a manner that does not require external financial assistance. This next step will require financial support, additional capacity-building, and careful oversight of their work to assist

MMWWO in becoming a self-sustaining organization. End Comment.
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